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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted at Miami-Dade Community College (Florida) to assess the performance of ESL students on the College Level Academic Skills Test (CLAST) and the relationship of campus location, ESL credits earned, grade point average (GPA), and developmental coursework on CLAST scores. The study focused on all students who took all four sections of the CLAST in fall 1984. Study findings included the following: (1) only about 10% of all fall 1984 test takers had enrolled in ESL courses; (2) on each of the CLAST subtests, students without ESL coursework performed better than those with ESL coursework, with the differences most evident in the essay portion of the test, and least evident in the computation portion; (3) the number of subtests a student passed seemed to bear little relationship to the number of ESL credits the student had taken; (4) students with a GPA in their ESL coursework of 3.0 or higher were more likely to pass three or four of the CLAST subtests than students with lower GPA's; (5) cumulative GPA was a better predictor of CLAST performance in writing and computation than either the number of ESL credits taken or ESL GPA; and (6) almost 75% of the ESL students had some coursework in developmental reading, writing, or computation. (EJV)

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THE PERFORMANCE OF ENGLISH AS SECOND LANGUAGE STUDENTS (ESL) ON THE FALL 1984 CLAST

Research Report No. 85-14

March 1985

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The Performance of English
As Second Language Students (ESL)
On The Fall 1984 CLAST

The performance of ESL students on the College-Level Academic Skills Test (CLAST) is an area which has been subject to much speculation and little data. The only data previously available were based on two transcript analyses of samples of high scorers and low scorers (Research Report 84-21, Research Report 83-21). Both studies found that ESL students were more likely to be in the low scoring group. This finding is not surprising since the CLAST is a test which specifically tries to measure some facility with the English language, and ESL students definitely lack that proficiency upon entering Miami-Dade.

This study is a first attempt to assess in some depth the performance of ESL students on the CLAST and to address some of the issues related to the ESL program. Specifically, the following questions were considered:

1. Did students who enrolled in ESL courses perform more poorly than non-ESL enrollees?
2. Did ESL students differ among themselves on their performance based on campus location?
3. Did the number of credits in ESL courses make a difference in CLAST performance?
4. Did the grade point average that students received in their ESL coursework relate to CLAST performance?
5. Did their cumulative grade point average relate to CLAST performance with and without the inclusion of ESL credits in the calculation?
6. What proportion of ESL students also had developmental credits? Did this group perform any differently?

The data base for this analysis consisted of all students who took all four sections of the CLAST in the Fall of 1984. Students were designated as having taken ESL work if they had one or more credits in any course which contained ESL in the course prefix. The calculation of ESL grade

point average included all courses completed, even though the student repeated one or more of them due to a failing grade.

Results

Only about 10% of the Fall 1984 testtakers had enrolled in English as a Second Language (ESL) courses. Data are not available on how this proportion compares to the proportion enrolled in ESL coursework upon first entering college. It is likely, however, that ESL students have a higher dropout rate and are therefore less represented on the CLAST than some other groups. By campus, Wolfson Campus had the largest proportion of examinees who were ESL students (18%) and South had the smallest (7.5%).

Results indicated that the CLAST performance was decidedly lower for those students who entered college and enrolled in ESL courses. A review of the data in Table 1 clearly shows that fewer ESL students pass all four parts of the CLAST than students without ESL coursework. Wolfson Campus had the greatest proportion of students passing all four sections (39%) while North had the lowest with 16% of their ESL students passing. The differences among the campuses were statistically significant (χ^2=12.4, df=4, p<.01).

On each of the four CLAST subtests, students without ESL coursework performed significantly better than students with ESL coursework (see Table 2). These differences were most evident on the Essay. Passing rates were most similar in Computation. On each campus non-ESL students performed better than ESL students except on computation. ESL students on each campus performed similarly to one another except on the multiple-choice writing exam. In this area, South and Wolfson had significantly higher passing rates than North Campus ESL students. In the areas of reading and the essay, the chi-square test approached significance but did not reach it at the required .05 level.

Differences among the performance of students who had completed ESL coursework could not be explained by the number of credits that they took in ESL. As shown by Table 3, the number of subtests a student passed

Table 1

Number of Subtests Passed for Fall 1984
Based on ESL Enrollment

	Number of Subtests Passed						
	0 - 2		3		4		
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Total
College-Wide							
Without ESL	62	6.5	133	13.9	761	79.6	956
With ESL	34	35.1	37	38.1	26	26.8	97
North Campus							
Without ESL	38	12.2	49	15.8	224	72.0	311
With ESL	18	58.1	8	25.8	5	16.1	31
South Campus							
Without ESL	20	3.8	61	11.7	441	84.5	522
With ESL	11	26.2	19	45.2	12	28.6	42
Wolfson Campus							
Without ESL	4	3.8	20	19.1	81	77.1	105
With ESL	4	17.4	10	43.5	9	39.1	23

Table 2

Proportion Passing Each CLAST Subtest
Of ESL and Non-ESL Enrollees
Fall 1984 Administration

	Number in Group	Passed							
		Reading		Writing		Computation		Essay	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
College-Wide									
Without ESL	956	903	94.5	904	94.6	940	98.3	801	83.8
With ESL	97	65	67.0	79	81.4	92	94.9	30	30.9
North Campus									
Without ESL	311	281	90.4	279	89.7	301	96.8	246	79.1
With ESL	31	16	51.6	19	61.3	30	96.8	6	19.4
South Campus									
Without ESL	522	505	96.7	506	96.9	518	99.2	454	87.0
With ESL	42	31	73.8	39	92.9	40	95.2	13	31.0
Wolfson Campus									
Without ESL	105	99	94.3	102	97.1	104	99.1	84	80.0
With ESL	23	18	78.3	21	91.3	21	91.3	11	47.8

seemed to bear little relationship to the number of ESL credits the student had taken. This same finding also held for each of the four areas of the CLAST (see Table 4).

Working on the assumption that grouping ESL credits into three large categories may have hidden some significant relationship between CLAST performance and number of credits, correlations were calculated between the number of ESL credits and performance in reading, writing, computation, and the essay portions of the CLAST. In each case the correlations were non-significant, and all were under .10 (see Table 5).

The relationship between grade point average in ESL coursework and CLAST performance was stronger. As shown by Table 6, a majority of the ESL students (62.8%) had grade point averages in their ESL coursework of 3.0 or better. This group also was more likely to pass three or four of the CLAST subtests. As shown by Table 7, those with high ESL grade point averages outperformed students with lower ESL GPA's in the areas of reading, computation, and the essay. There was no difference in all the groups on the multiple-choice writing portion of the CLAST. These findings need to be interpreted cautiously, however, since the number on which the analysis was based is so small. In fact, when the relationship between ESL grades and CLAST performance was assessed using a correlation coefficient, the only area which produced a significant correlation was computation (see Table 5). Even that correlation was not at all sizable.

Perhaps these differences were due in part to the fact that some students' ESL grade point averages were based on a single course while other students had as many as 50 hours of ESL credits on which to base their ESL grade point average. For example, 15% of the group had 6 or fewer credits and another 15% had more than 30. In this case, cumulative grade point average, with or without the inclusion of ESL credits, might be a better predictor of CLAST performance than performance in ESL coursework alone. Indeed, cumulative GPA after it has been adjusted by removing all grade points due to ESL credits, might be the best indicator of CLAST performance since the courses remaining should more closely reflect the tasks required by the CLAST.

Table 3

Number of CLAST Subtests Passed
Based on Number of ESL Credits

	Number of Subtests Passed							
	0 - 2		3		4		Total	
ESL Credits	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1-10	10	34.5	12	41.4	7	24.1	29	29.9
11-20	9	31.1	12	41.4	8	27.6	29	29.9
21 or More	15	38.5	13	33.3	11	28.2	39	40.2

Table 4

Proportion Passing Each CLAST Subtest
Based on Number of ESL Credits Earned

		Passed							
	Number in	Reading		Writing		Computation		Essay	
ESL Credits	Group	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1-10	29	18	62.1	23	79.3	27	93.1	9	31.0
11-20	29	21	72.4	25	86.2	28	96.6	9	31.0
21 or More	39	26	66.7	31	79.5	37	94.9	12	30.8
Chi Square		.71		.62		.35		.001	

Table 5

Correlations Between CLAST Performance and Four Measures of Grade Point Average and Credits

	CLAST Subtests			
	Reading	Writing	Computation	Essay
ESL Credits	-.05	-.01	-.09	.06
ESL GPA	.18	.16	.21*	.20
Cumulative GPA	.20*	.28*	.44*	.16
GPA without ESL Credits	.18	.24*	.43*	.10

*Significant at the $p < .05$ level.

Table 6

Number of CLAST Subtests Passed Based on
Grade Point Average in ESL Courses

	Number of Subtests Passed							
	0 - 2		3		4		Total	
ESL GPA	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Less Than 2.5	10	55.6	6	33.3	2	11.1	18	18.6
2.5 - 2.99	11	61.2	5	27.8	2	11.1	18	18.6
3.0 - 3.49	7	20.6	15	44.1	12	35.3	34	35.1
3.5 - 4.0	6	22.3	11	40.7	10	37.0	27	27.7
Total	34	35.1	37	38.1	26	26.8	97	100.0

Table 7

Proportion Passing Each CLAST Subtest
Based on Grade Point Average in ESL Courses

	Number in	Reading		Writing		Computation		Essay	
ESL GPA	Group	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Less Than 2.5	18	8	44.4	15	83.3	15	83.3	2	11.1
2.5 - 2.99	18	8	44.4	12	66.7	16	88.9	3	16.7
3.0 - 3.49	34	27	79.4	29	85.3	34	100.0	15	44.1
3.5 - 4.0	27	22	81.5	23	85.2	27	100.0	10	37.0
Total	97	65	67.0	79	81.4	92	94.9	30	30.9
Chi Square		13.2*		3.2		9.5**		8.3*	

*Significant at the $p < .05$ level
**Significant but table is so sparse that the test may not be valid.

Recalculating the cumulative grade point average of the students after removing ESL credits caused the cumulative grade point average to decrease for 75 (or 78%) of the cases, to increase for 19 (or 20%) of the cases and to remain unchanged for 2% or 2 cases. These changes ranged from .01 to as much as .70 change in cumulative grade point average. This recalculation caused five students' grade point averages to drop into the category of less than 2.0. In addition, the adjusted GPA's showed slightly more people with high GPA's passing all four sections of CLAST and slightly more with GPA's in the low range of less than 2.5 to be failing. See Table 8 for full results.

As shown by Table 5, cumulative grade point average with or without the inclusion of ESL credits was a better predictor of CLAST performance in writing and in computation than either number of ESL credits or GPA. It was no better in the areas of reading or the essay. In fact, the recalculation of grade point average without ESL credits decidedly lowered the correlation on the essay, though in no case was the relationship between the essay and any of the measures statistically significant.

Evidently, most ESL students supplement their ESL and regular college coursework with other courses in basic skills. As shown by Table 9, almost three-fourths of the ESL students who took the Fall 1984 CLAST had some coursework in developmental reading, writing, or computation. Statistical analysis indicated, however, that no strong relationship existed between the number of areas in which a student took developmental coursework and the number of CLAST subtests passed. Nor could any statistically significant differences be found in a separate analysis of each of the three basic skills areas (See Table 10). Even the differences in the passing rate on the essay between those who did and did not enroll in developmental writing did not reach statistical significance. Therefore, it must be concluded that ESL students with developmental coursework perform no differently on CLAST than ESL students without developmental courses.

Table 8

Number of CLAST Subtests Passed Based on
Two Methods of Calculating Cumulative Grade Point Average

	Number of Subtests Passed						
	0 - 2		3		4		
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Total
Unadjusted GPA							
Less Than 2.0	1	25.0	3	75.0	0	-	4
2.0 - 2.49	13	46.5	8	28.6	7	25.0	28
2.5 - 2.99	11	33.4	14	42.4	8	24.5	33
3.0 - 3.49	7	27.0	9	34.6	10	38.5	26
3.5 - 4.0	0	-	3	75.0	1	25.0	4
GPA After ESL Credits Were Removed							
Less Than 2.0	3	33.4	4	44.4	2	22.2	9
2.0 - 2.49	13	44.9	10	34.5	6	20.7	29
2.5 - 2.99	10	31.3	14	43.8	8	25.0	32
3.0 - 3.49	6	28.6	6	28.6	9	42.9	21
3.5 - 4.0	0	-	3	75.0	1	25.0	4

Table 9

Number of CLAST Subtests Passed by ESL Students Based on Enrollment In Zero, One, Two, or Four Developmental Areas

Developmental Areas	Number of Subtests Passed						Total Number
	0 - 2		3		4		
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
0	8	29.6	9	33.3	10	37.0	27
1	15	45.5	11	33.3	7	21.2	33
2	9	31.0	15	51.7	5	17.2	29
3	2	25.0	2	25.0	4	50.0	8

Table 10

Comparison of ESL Students on the CLAST Subtests Based on Further Enrollment in Developmental Work

Subtests	No Developmental			Took Developmental		
	Number in Group	Number Passing	Percent Passing	Number in Group	Number Passing	Percent Passing
Reading	67	45	69.2	30	20	66.7
Writing	39	31	79.5	58	48	82.8
Computation	70	67	95.7	27	25	92.6
Essay	39	15	38.5	58	15	25.9

Discussion

This analysis has made it painfully clear that students who enter Miami-Dade and enroll in English as Second Language courses face a grave handicap at the point that they must write the CLAST. In fact, if the Fall 1984 test results are an accurate indicator, the number of ESL students who will receive an A.A. degree from Miami-Dade in the near future will slow to a trickle.

It is also clear that Wolfson Campus students who enrolled in ESL programs are performing better than their counterparts on other campuses. What is not clear is the reason for this difference: is it the makeup of the student bodies on the campuses or is it the quality of the programs in which the students are enrolling? Other studies will be needed before any kind of answer to this question will be available.

The grades a student earned while enrolled in ESL credits was more important than the number of credits completed in the area. However, the number of credits in ESL was also confounded in this study. Students with few credits in ESL could either have needed very little work to become proficient or they could have dropped out of the ESL program prior to completion. Those students with many credits could have either learned a great deal about the English language or simply have moved through the system and exited without a sufficient level of proficiency to pass CLAST. Issues such as these are hidden within the data and must be addressed elsewhere.

Certainly, cumulative grade point average provided a better predictor of CLAST performance than either ESL grade point average or number of ESL credits. Yet even here the relationship was not strong. This was particularly true in reading and the essay, two areas directly addressed in ESL courses. The high proportion of ESL students passing computation showed that ESL students are bright and capable; the low proportions passing the communication sections showed these same students were still not proficient in English at the time of the CLAST. Cumulative grade point averages

revealed that these students received good grades. Even after ESL credits were removed, 60% had cumulative grade point averages of 2.5 or better.

It has been stated that a number of ESL students leave the program only to enroll in developmental courses because they are still not proficient in English. The data showed that most ESL students take developmental courses. The data further indicated that there was no difference in CLAST performance between those who did and those who did not enroll in developmental courses. It is possible, for example, that those who enrolled in developmental courses did so because they knew they still fell below their counterparts and that developmental work brought them up to a level where they were comparable to those ESL students who did not enroll. Again, answers simply are not known at this time.

This study has answered a few questions and raised many more. The question of what to do with Miami-Dade's ESL students as they face the CLAST can only be answered after further study. Finding some answers appears imperative to easing the burden of CLAST faced by this group of students. A longitudinal cohort file has just been developed and should provide some answers on what happens to ESL students as they progress through Miami-Dade. Some answers should be forthcoming in the next several months.

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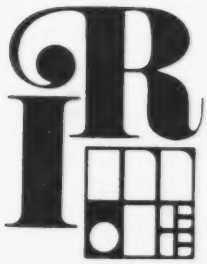

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